New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1944

Volume V, Number 2 • Yearly Subscription $15.00 • Week of January 17, 1944

1944 PRODUCTIONS

Premieres in Other Years

Original Reviews Appeared in These Volumes

1943 Vol.

STAGE PLAY	PAGES
Another Love Story	260, 261, 262
*Carmen Jones	207, 208, 209
*Connecticut Yankee (A)	219, 220, 221, 222
Doctors Disagree	186, 187, 188
*Early to Bed	314, 315, 316
*Harriet	364, 365, 366
*Kiss and Tell	356, 357, 358
Listen, Professor	190, 191, 192
*Lovers and Friends	210, 211, 212
*Merry Widow (The)	301, 302, 303
*Oklahoma	341, 342, 343
*One Touch of Venus	264, 265, 266
*Othello	256, 257, 258
Outrageous Fortune	237, 238, 239
Something for the Boys	398, 399, 400
South Pacific	184, 185, 186
*Three's a Family	328, 329, 330
*Tomorrow the World	334, 335, 336
*Two Mrs. Carrolls (The)	304, 305, 306
*Victory Belles	244, 245, 246
*Voice of the Turtle (The)	199, 200, 201, 202
What's Up	229, 230, 231
*Winged Victory	216, 217, 218, 219
*Ziegfeld Follies	338, 339, 340

1942 Vol.

*Doughgirls (The)	124, 125, 126
*Janie	244, 245, 246
*Rosalinda	187, 188, 189

1941 Vol.

*Angel Street	182, 183, 184, 185
*Arsenic and Old Lace	417, 418, 419, 420

1940 Vol.

*Life With Father	457, 458, 459

*Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of January 17, 1944.

1944 PRODUCTIONS

Premieres During 1944

Reviews Appear in This Volume

STAGE PLAY	PAGES
*Over Twenty-One	297
*Ramshackle Inn	295
*Storm Operation	289
*Jackpot	284
*Suds in Your Eye	287

*Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of January 17, 1944.

THE DEAN WRITES AGAIN

Here is good news for the subscribers to New York Theater Critics Reviews. Burns Mantle, drama critic emeritus of the New York Daily News, who so happily summed up the first half of the current situation in the issue of last week (two weeks ago, and followed through with comment on current openings) has favored us with another contribution.

Although, to get away from the pressure of a daily column and newspaper deadlines, Mr. Mantle gave up newspaper reviewing at the start of the 1943-44 season, he has not for a minute been out of touch with what is going on in the theatre. He is continuing the editorship of "The Best Plays," annual year book of the drama, which he began twenty-four years ago and which he has carried back to embrace the theatrical history of the current century.

The response to his initial contribution to this publication, "A Letter from an Old Subscriber," was so enthusiastically received that the publishers are extremely happy to be able to call attention to another contribution to be found on the back page.

Theatre Critics' Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York newspapers

NEW YORK SUN
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN

Published by CRITICS' THEATRE REVIEWS : : : 235 EAST 22ND STREET, NEW YORK 10, N. Y.

"Jackpot"

Musical comedy, with lyrics and music by Howard Dietz and Vernon Duke; book by Guy Bolton, Sidney Sheldon and Ben Roberts; staging by Roy Hargrave; dances by Lauretta Jefferson and Charles Weidman; settings by Raymond Sovey and Robert Edmond Jones. Presented by Vinton Freedley at the Alvin Theatre, Jan. 13, 1944.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
January 14, 1944

Tunes Without Comedy

By HOWARD BARNES

THE optimism of the title is only partially realized in "Jackpot." The new Vinton Freedley production is more of a songfest than a musical comedy. Fortunately, there are a lot of pleasant tunes and lyrics, some sprightly dancing, a chorus bouquet of beauties and an elegant production. These qualities go far in a show, even when there are only hints of a libretto. Allan Jones, Nanette Fabray and Betty Garrett intone the songs engagingly; the terpsichore ranges from taps to satirical ballet and Jerry Lester pulls off some very funny antics in spite of the book. While it certainly does not hit the jackpot, the Alvin carnival should do nicely this season.

The idea of the piece is amusing and topical enough to have inspired a better framework for the songs and dances. A pretty defense worker permits herself to be the prize in a war-bond selling campaign, and is promptly won by three marines. The trouble is that Guy Bolton, Sidney Sheldon and Ben Roberts have elaborated this conceit with a minimum of humor and enthusiasm. The libretto is so shaky, in fact, that vocal numbers are jammed together in a piece of awkward routining. Lester does wonders with practically no material, even when he has to resort to straight slapstick. Benny Baker and Mary Wickes have a harder time distilling laughter from dull jokes and situations. "Jackpot" is musical and it dances along at a smart pace, but it is short on comedy.

• • •

The musical interludes are generally felicitous. Vernon Duke has composed a score which pays equal attention to vocalizing and tricky stepping. Howard Dietz has fitted them with catchy lyrics. "I Kissed My Girl Goodbye" and "What Happened?" give Jones more than an even break; "Sugar Foot" and "He's Good for Nothing but Me" are first-rate accompaniments for individual and ensemble dance routines. The first-act finale is dedicated to a take-off on "Oklahoma!" with a number called "Grist for De Mille." It is moderately funny, but not nearly as entertaining as the Agnes De Mille ballets which it parodies. Don Liberto, Billie Worth and Althea Elder are excellent in a dance staged by Charles Weidman. Peter Hamilton, Florence Lessing and Flower Hujer execute ballet figures knowingly.

• • •

However awkward Jones may appear when the book gets shaky, he gives enthusiastically in the songs. In Miss Fabray he has an attractive leading lady, who is also easy to listen to. Miss Garrett takes a hand in the vocal numbers—a good idea when the plot runs thin and Miss Wickes has a couple of humorous ditties.

• • •

Among them, the principals make the best of the music in "Jackpot," and their assistants see to it that the dancing and the chorus backgrounds are exuberant. Only Lester seems to have been aware that some laughter was indicated in a musical comedy. He brings some snatches of fun to the proceedings, but not enough to make them more than intermittently satisfying. The show will doubtless prosper, but it lacks the zest and sustained mood of superior musical comedy concoctions.

THE CAST

Peggy	Althea Elder
Billie	Billie Worth
Mr. Dill	Morton L. Stevens
Bill Bender	Ben Lackland
Nancy Parker	Mary Wickes
Sally Madison	Nanette Fabray
Dexter De Wolf	Houston Richards
Edna	Jacqueline Susann
Hedy	Helena Goudvis
Hawley	John Kearny
Assistant bartender	Walter Monroe
Jerry Finch	Jerry Lester
Winkie Cotter	Benny Baker
Hank Trimble	Allan Jones
Girl	Flower Hujer
Reporter	Bill Jones
Tot Patterson	Althea Elder
Sergt. Naylor	Wendell Corey
Sergt. Maguire	Betty Garrett
Helen Westcott	Frances Robinson
Sniper	Bob Beam
First Marine	John Hamil
Second Marine	Bill Jones
Edith	Edith Turgell
Accordionist	Eva Barcinska
Monica	Drucilla Strain
Pat	Pat Ogden
Betty	Betty Stuart
Sherry	Sherry Shadburne
Mary Lou	Marie Louise Meade
Connie	Connie Constant
Nurse	Billie Worth

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
January 14, 1944

Musical 'Jackpot' Makes All the Motions But Doesn't Give

By JOHN CHAPMAN

WITH a coin machine, a jackpot is where the machinery spins in lovely rhythms, gives off delightful noises and then—wunk!—spills out bounty until you have to pick it off the floor. Vinton Freedley's musical, "Jackpot," which opened last night at the Alvin, is no such combination.

It is a tiring job of great effort and no little expense, whose humor is physical and whose wit is tiny-minded dirt. And I can't remember any of the songs unless I look in the back of the program to see what the titles are.

The machinery spins, all right, for professional manufacturers of that great American product, musical comedy, know the proper progression of choruses, love-songs, dances, big sets, specialty hoofing and a touch of plot. Involved in "Jackpot" are a number of able and generous workers, like Allan Jones, Nanette Fabray, Jerry Lester, Mary Wickes, Benny Baker and Betty Garrett. They do all there is for them to do but it isn't enough—and it isn't their fault.

Nor is it Mr. Freedley's fault. He may have made an initial error in judgment in deciding to produce "Jackpot," but once the decision was made he gave it good sets by Raymond Sovey and Robert Edmond Jones, a fairly good-looking chorus, costumes by Kiviette and all the other surroundings of a $4.40 show.

Girl Free With War Bond

The fault is the authors'. Three men—Guy Bolton, Sidney Sheldon and Ben Roberts—turned out a book which must have sounded better in the talking than in the writing. It's about a Treasury Department stunt for promoting War Bonds, in which a pin-up girl offers herself in marriage in a bond lottery. Whoever has the bond with the lucky number gets the girl.

Three marines—Jones, Lester and Baker—chip in and buy an $18.75 bond in a saloon, and when they win they get Miss Fabray. This is good getting, for she is a sweetly attractive ingenue. Jones, of course, is the guy who finally possesses her, but Lester and Baker do an awful lot of pawing and sweating before they give up.

The fault is also the lyricist's, who is Howard Dietz. His jingles run fairly monotonously along a primitive sex theme, and the nearest they come to cleverness is in the rhyming of "myriad," "weari-ed" and "period." They are sometimes bright but they have no heart. Vernon Duke's tunes are pleasant enough, because they hit all the regular notes, but none of them has clung in my possibly unretentive mind.

Clever Ballet Idea

Last night's audience sat on its hands most of the time and when it applauded it did so perfunctorily and out of a sense of duty. Once it did get up a little steam over a ballet which closed the first act, titled 'Grist for De Mille" and staged by Charles Weidman.

This is a burlesque of such Agnes De Mille numbers as are to be found in "Oklahoma" and "One Touch of Venus," in which Miss Wickes explains that things aren't the same in musical comedy since the ballet came to Shubert Alley. The idea and the way Mr. Weidman has worked it out are genuinely humorous, but unfortunately Mr. Weidman hasn't dancers good enough to get the most out of it. If you're going to top De Mille you must have the best dancers.

Once again—for at least the third time this season—a musical comedy orchestra is under the direction of Max Meth. I share Burton Rascoe's affections for Mr. Meth, a dancing gnome with some of the appearance and many of the mannerisms of the late, great Arthur Bodanzky of the Metropolitan Opera. Meth is intense and musicianly, but a good show, if you watch him for a spell you get to thinking the songs are better than they really are.

NEW YORK TIMES
January 14, 1944

Three U. S. Marines Win a Girl in a War Bond Lottery in 'Jackpot,' a New Freedley Musical at the Alvin Theatre

By LEWIS NICHOLS

ALTHOUGH he calls his latest show "Jackpot," Vinton Freedley unfortunately may be fathering the wish rather than the reality. For the musical which opened last evening at the attractive Alvin is not up to the producer's generally high standards of living; it is, in fact, so much below them as to be a not very good show at all. The last Freedley musical was abandoned in Boston because the producer thought he could not satisfactorily improve it; with "Jackpot" he should have remained on the road a bit longer before braving Broadway's cold east wind.

No one expects a great deal of musical comedy books these days, for at best they are periods of conversation between musical numbers which naturally are the heart of the business. However, the one contributed to "Jackpot" by Guy Bolton, Sidney Shelton and Ben Roberts is one of the feeblest in quite a time, so sleepy that it goes far below any possible expectation. The periods of conversation are long and not funny, and whereas at normal musicals an audience sits patiently through them, at this they sit in dread.

In the attempt to bolster up the theme of three marines who win a girl in a lottery to sell war bonds, "Jackpot" calls on the services of Benny Baker and Jerry Lester, comedians of record. Mr. Baker has a wonderful face and can do more with a smile than with the words of a bad book hanging around his neck to drag him down. To the show he contributes a few cheerful moments, as does Mr. Lester occasionally, but for the greater part both are knocked about by their material. Jokes with double meanings do not always disguise the vacant expression of a book.

The other people in the cast are somewhat better off. Nanette Fabray is the girl who offers herself as the war-bond prize, and there is no doubt she would be a prize in any lottery in the world. She is pretty, or better, and can sing and carries a manner which is both gay and charming. Allan Jones is the chief marine winner of the bride; obviously he can sing the songs, but he does not always have the bounce which goes with good musical comedy. Mary Wickes and Betty Garrett are the other two principals and both find their material not of the top rank.

Vernon Duke, who adds an "isky" to his last name when he lets his hair grow to contribute pieces to the Philharmonic, has written the music, which probably is no better than average. A number called "Sugar Foot" is destined for fame, and "I Kissed My Girl Goodby," "What Happened?" and "One Track Mind" are the best of the others. Howard Dietz has written the lyrics, although not to a uniform excellence. The dancing is not distinguished, the main number being one called "Grist for De Mille," which is a parody on the ballets of "Oklahoma" and "One Touch of Venus" and is not very funny.

In his time Mr. Freedley has given this city a great many enjoyable musical shows, and so is a civic hero. But not for "Jackpot."

NEW YORK POST

January 14, 1944

Vinton Freedley's New Musical Comedy, 'Jackpot,' at the Alvin

By WILELLA WALDORF

IT is a very depressing sensation to charge into the Alvin Theatre ready to be rendered hysterical by the new Vinton Freedley musical show, "Jackpot," and realize around the middle of the first act that you are slowly petrifying with boredom.

As far as we know, there are no rules of etiquette to cover such an emergency. Is it better to go quietly off to sleep, hoping that things will pick up later on, or should one titter frantically and applaud with spurious warmth as the proceedings become more and more funereal?

There were times last night when we decided it was all going on via a phonograph record, and the record was stuck. People kept cracking the same dull, sexy jokes, and nearly every time we happened to glance at the stage Marine Private Jerry Lester or Marine Private Benny Baker was being hugged by a female, or was trying not to be hugged by a female, or was hugging a female.

Every now and then the hugging would be interrupted while Allan Jones sang a serious song about love, flanked by a sturdy quartet of fellow Marines. Nearly everybody seemed to be in the Marine Corps. Even Betty Garrett.

Three Strong Men Wrote the Book

It hardly seems possible, but according to the program, it took three men to write the book of "Jackpot." It hinges on raffling off a lady war worker to the lucky buyer of a war bond, and three Marines, who buy a bond together, win the prize. Nanette Fabray is lovely as the girl, but she is lost most of the time among the tired jokes, while Betty Garrett, a sergeant no less, works herself into a lather trying to make some rather ordinary songs sound scintillating.

Miss Fabray and Miss Garrett are two of this department's favorite musical comedy actresses and it hardly seemed credible that they could be in such a spot, but there they were working their heads off to little purpose, while Mary Wickes, who is a funny girl, all but tore herself apart trying to be uproarious and the Messrs. Lester and Baker did everything but ride up and down on the curtain.

It is now apparently a rule that any Broadway musical comedy costing over $50,000 must feature (1) a ballet by Agnes De Mille, or (2) a take-off on a ballet by Agnes De Mille. "Jackpot" has a take-off entitled "Grist for De Mille," staged by Charles Weidman. Like the rest of the show it is neither very good nor very bad, just mediocre.

Mr. Freedley, as usual, has dressed it all up colorfully and provided the customary expensive trappings. Song followed song, joke followed joke, and at one point the Marines had camouflage drill and the comedians got dressed up like trees. Finally a lady came along leading a dog. Blackout.

It was at this point that we went numb all over and it occurred to us that if something violently amusing didn't happen soon we should probably have to be carried out of the theatre. An embarrassing dilemma.

Fortunately something happened. The book writers brought in a fellow named Dexter de Wolf, who had just divorced his sixth or seventh wife, and was supposed to be a take-off on Tommy Manville.

Compared to the rest of the goings-on this struck us as highly diverting.

After a discreet titter and a vigorous stamping session devoted to getting rid of the pins and needles in our feet, we were able to leave at the finale under our own power.

Another hit from the Freedley foundry, no doubt.

NEW YORK SUN

January 14, 1944

'Jackpot,' Vinton Freedley's New Musical Comedy, Is Presented At the Alvin

By WARD MOREHOUSE

VINTON FREEDLEY, erstwhile actor Harvard quarterback (pre-Bertelli era), is a showman with great prestige in the song and dance field. He has given Broadway nearly a score of hits since "Lady, Be Good." And now, upon the stage of the playhouse that he built and formerly owned, he presents his latest musical comedy, "Jackpot." It is not all that it should be.

"Jackpot," which opened last night at the Alvin, is good-looking. There are some lively dance numbers, several nice songs, a lot of pretty girls, attractive costumes and settings and a couple of entertaining comics. Perhaps that should be enough. But more is needed. Somehow the show is routine and uneventful. The book isn't very good and comes to a dead halt at intervals throughout the evening. And the principals are not as exciting as they have been in Freedley musical productions of the past.

The basic idea of the libretto, as the musical show book used to be known in the days of Harold Atteridge, is funny enough—three rough-and-ready Marines making a joint purchase of a bond in a bond-selling campaign that offers a beautiful war plant bride to the bachelors of the nation as the lucky number prize. Well, the trio of Marines hit the winning number and each becomes the owner of a third of a girl. There are a lot of complications as the story goes along, but there's hardly a member of the corps this side of Parris Island who wouldn't have guessed that she would belong to Handsome Hank Trimble by 12:15 o'clock.

The book that has been contrived by Guy Bolton (once of the famed Princess Theater triumvirate), Sidney Sheldon and Ben Roberts serves well enough for the first act, but in the second it really flounders, notwithstanding the energies and acrobatics of the show's two funny men, Jerry Lester and Benny Baker. The lyricist, Howard Dietz, and the composer, Vernon Duke, fare somewhat better than the book writers do. Mr. Dietz is a high-powered motion picture executive in his odd moments, but for the past decade and more he has proven himself a facile hand at lyrics. The best of the Dietz-Duke tunes are "Sugar Foot," "My Top Sergeant," "I Kissed My Girl Goodbye" and "It Was Nice Knowing You."

Mr. Freedley, in some of his previous productions, has had far more impressive casts than he presents in "Jackpot." Playgoers have come to expect outstanding personalities in his shows. But casting is apparently a problem these days, and when this production was being made ready for rehearsal there were apparently no Astaires and no Gaxtons and no Victor Moores around. And no Danny Kaye, either.

The two comedians of "Jackpot"—the moon-faced, artful and comical Benny Baker and the bounding Jerry Lester of the distorted visage and the demoniacal grin—work hard to put life into their scenes, and they are occasionally successful. Allan Jones, in the romantic lead, has a good voice and looks the part, but when the show sags he isn't very helpful.

The pretty Nanette Fabray is only passable as the bond-drive bride. She hasn't had enough experience to carry the role. Betty Garrett, however, is quite zestful all the way. Billie Worth and Althea Elder are attractive specialty dancers, and the ensemble includes several beauties you're likely to meet in the Barberry Room any afternoon.

Mr. Freedley has given "Jackpot" a tasteful production, as he always does. Kiviette has done well with the costumes, as have Raymond Sovey and Robert Edmond Jones with the scenery.

To sum it up, "Jackpot" is at its best when it's dancing. It is encumbered by a book that gives promise and then falls apart. Just a so-so show—funny in spots, frisky at times, always good to look at, occasionally tuneful, but never up to the Freedley standard.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM

January 14, 1944

Jackpot Wastes Effort In Musical Comedy

By BURTON RASCOE

NOT to beat around the bush a first-rate production has been lavished on a third-rate musical comedy in Jackpot, which

opened at the Alvin last night, and the show is third-rate only because everybody, including singers, good dancers, lyric writer and a swell orchestra leader, has been whipped by a weak, derivative, uninteresting and often actually unpleasant musical score by Vernon Duke, a split personality who writes serious compositions for symphony orchestras under his real name, Vladimir Dukelsky.

The show is pretty to look at and it has other merits which I shall expatiate upon presently; but the songs are simply without spirit, verve or sustained melody and they are so tricky that even as ear-caressing a warbler as Allen Jones can get very little out of them and they throw Nanette Fabray, Betty Garrett and Jerry Lester for a loop.

With every number it sounds as though Mr. Duke had got a melody that was very good, but didn't know how to develop it melodically, with any rhythmic or tonal carry-through. After from four to eight bars the melody may break abruptly into a queer, unrelated theme in another key, often an octave lower and flatted so that the singer seems to be talking rather than singing.

Music Hurts Verse

Or Mr. Duke will take a melody almost exactly like that of some recent very popular song, repeat it a couple of times and then go off into something that sounds like an eccentricity by Eric Satie or Darius Milhaud. With music like that to compose lyrics for, it is no wonder that Howard Dietz's verses are often banal and silly, with rhymes such as "triumph" with "my oomph." If anything of real merit could have been got out of the music, Max Meth, the orchestra director—for he is one of the best in the land—could have got it; and proof of this is that the overture, containing medleys from Mr. Duke's songs but orchestrated by other hands, as directed by Mr. Meth, are lively, melodious and rhythmically infectious.

The merits are these: The voice and presence of Allan Jones; the face, spirit and legs of pretty Nanette Fabray; the blithe, fresh beauty and comic spirit of Betty Garrett, who looks enough like Celeste Holm to be her twin and most know it, because she opens her eyes wide and puckers her mouth like Miss Holm; the dancing of Billie Worth and Althea Elder; the comedy of the angular Mary Wickes; the appealing moon face of Benny Baker; the rowdy energy of Jerry Lester; the settings by Raymond Sovey and Robert Edmond Jones; the costumes by Kiviette and a chorus that looks as though it had been made up from choice beauties among artists and photographers' models.

• • •

The book, attributed to Guy Bolton, Sidney Shelton and Ben Roberts, is a little like a single paragraph of news signed by three reporters. A war worker (Miss Fabray) agrees to marry the holder of the winning number of a war bond in a lottery, in order to stimulate sales.

Three Marines (the Messrs. Jones, Lester and Baker) jointly own the bond (under Mr. Jones' name) which carries the winning number. So the Messrs. Baker and Lester claim a third each of Miss Fabray, although Mr. Lester is already engaged to Miss Garrett and Mr. Baker is being hotly pursued by Miss Wickes. In a jealous huff, after having fallen in love with Mr. Jones, Miss Fabray hurriedly marries "a male Peggy Joyce" (Houston Richards) but on their wedding night the Marines land in force in the bridal suite to announce the marriage is no go, because Mr. Richards' many divorces are all illegal.

Perhaps with the several smash hits among new musical comedies and the successful revival of old favorites during the past year, too high a standard has been set and that, in a less opulent season, Jackpot would be cheerfully welcomed, for there is nothing cheap or shoddy about it. It is disappointing only because of the poor quality of the music. If you don't expect too much, you may enjoy it.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
January 14, 1944

Nanette Fabray Has Feminine Lead in Musical About the Marines

By ROBERT GARLAND

TOO much of almost everything has gone into the "Jackpot" which arrived last night at the Alvin. Too much of almost everything but humor. Frankly, I'm afraid you'll find the libretto on the dull side; too long, too complicated, too lacking in wit and humor. And, when you stop to consider the fact that three such book-makers as Guy Bolton, Sidney Sheldon and Ben Roberts got together on it, this seems a shame.

As you very well know, Vinton Freedley has not stinted on this, his latest production. There are tunes by Vernon Duke and lyrics by Howard Dietz. There are ballets by Charles Weidman and costumes by Kiviette. There are settings by Raymond Sovey and Robert Edmond Jones. And the orchestra is under the direction of Max Meth.

Who could ask for anything more? Well, I could! I'd like some brighter fun or a better story. Or both, if that were possible! But I suppose it isn't possible. If it were, Mr. Freedley would have provided them. A producer with his skill, taste and generosity should have been able to find a brighter and better libretto, somewhere. But he quite obviously wasn't, although it hurts my heart to say so.

Third of a Girl

The story which, in two acts and five times that number of scenes, "Jackpot" sets out to tell has a sort of War Bond-Marine Corps background. That is to say, a beautiful blond is given away with a beautiful bond and three members of the United States Marine Corps fall heir to her—the Hank Trimble who is Allan Jones, the Winkie Cotter who is Benny Baker and the Jerry Finch who is Jerry Lester.

The more or less lucky lady is the Sally Madison who is Nanette Fabray. The Marines land but, as you can readily suppose, they, for the most part, fail to have the situation well in hand. What earthly good is a third of a girl to a sailor-in-soldier's-clothing? Or vice versa, for that matter! Or to a musical-comedy libretto?

But after twistings and turnings, songs and scene-changes, dances, and in innuendos, it is the Hank Trimble of Allen Jones who captures the Sally Madison of Nanette Fabray. He captures her with the assistance of the piece's outstanding song, a really fetching ballad called "One Track Mind" and sung with effect and feeling—and beneath a Juliet balcony—by Mr. Jones. It's a lovely number.

'One Track Mind'

As star of the occasion, Allan Jones is as lyric as he is likable. He sings "I Kissed My Girl Goodbye" with a chorus of Marines; "A Piece of a Girl" with his fellow winners; "What Happened?" with Sally; the aforesaid "One Track Mind" alone. He sings them with charm, assurance and effectiveness. But, as I have said, it is the last-named you'll be taking home with you. It really is something!

Nanette Fabray—you saw her in "Let's Face It" and in "By Jupiter" after Constance Moore had gone—is her winning self as the little lady who falls into the Marines. She tells it to them, too, whenever the opportunity arises. She also sings—"Blind Date" alone; "What Happened?" with Sally; the aforesaid "One Track Mind" alone. He sings them with charm, assurance and effectiveness. But, as I have said, it is the last-named you'll be taking home with you. It really is something!

Nanette Fabray—you saw her in "Let's Face It" and in "By Jupiter" after Constance Moore had gone—is her winning self as the little lady who falls into the Marines. She tells it to them, too, whenever the opportunity arises. She also sings—"Blind Date" alone; "What Happened?" with Sally; the aforesaid "One Track Mind" alone. He sings them with charm, assurance and effectiveness. But, as I have said, it is the last-named you'll be taking home with you. It really is something!

Although they worked hard at it all evening, I'm afraid I didn't find Jerry Lester and Benny Baker as hilarious as they hoped to be. A goodish section of the audience did, however, which is quite all right with me. The backgrounds supplied by Messrs. Sovey and Jones are handsomely pictorial; the costumes by Kiviette are expensively colorful . . . I wish I could really go into my number about "Jackpot." But, honestly, I've done the best I can.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
January 14, 1944

A Big Musical And a Bad One

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

THERE are few safe bets on Broadway, but a Vinton Freedley musical is usually one of them. Consequently *Jackpot* is something to sit through in amazement. It is a complete frost, an unmitigated bore, an ocean-crossing of tedium. The completeness of the disaster is hard to understand, seeing how many talented and experienced people are mixed up in it. One or two of them, you would think, might have taken a stand. But there is almost nothing in the music to make you forget the book, and less yet in the dancing to make you enjoy the music. The comics work their heads off, and are not funny. The chorus forms and reforms, and is not beguiling. The costumes lack oomph. The lyrics lack cleverness. There isn't much you can do except look at Nanette Fabray—who is still a stunner—when she is on the stage, and snooze quietly when she is off.

The book, as usual, is the worst offender, though the idea behind it is hardly more reprehensible than most. A beautiful girl (Miss Fabray) patriotically agrees to marry the lucky-number man in a huge War Bond campaign. The winning bond is jointly owned by three Marines, and from there on it's up to the authors. The Messrs. Bolton, Sheldon and Roberts have elected to indulge in a great deal of dreary dirt, some equally dreary horseplay, and a lot else that is just plain stupid.

Mr. Duke's score may glitter by comparison, but it is no more than tolerable, the pleasantest numbers perhaps being *Sugar Foot* and *I Kissed My Girl Goodbye*. The dancing is deplorable, not one routine having any real zip. The first-act finale, a takeoff on Agnes De Mille, not only lacks any semblance of wit but isn't even danced well. "They're satiring the ballet," said a lady behind me; which about sums it up.

The performers have a tough time of it. Miss Fabray has a pleasant personality in addition to good looks; and Allan Jones makes an agreeable enough romantic lead. Jerry Lester, Benny Baker and Mary Wickes have to bear the comedy burden, and though none of them is in the great tradition, they can all do better with the right material. Betty Garrett, a nice all-around girl for musical shows, is largely left stranded also. *Jackpot* just doesn't pay off in any direction.

BACK THE ATTACK
BUY THE
4th
WAR BONDS TODAY

"Suds in Your Eye"

Comedy by Jack Kirkland, based on the novel of the same name by Mary Lasswell. Staged by Mr. Kirkland; settings by Joseph B. Platt. Presented by Katharine Brown and J. H. Del Bondio at the Cort Theatre, January 12, 1944.

NEW YORK POST
January 13, 1944

Brenda Forbes Is a Riot in 'Suds in Your Eye' at the Cort

By WILELLA WALDORF

THE first act of "Suds in Your Eye" could easily be given as a one-act play, and it might be a good idea except that three acts are customary and most theatre-goers don't think they've had their money's worth unless they stay until 11 o'clock.

So there were three acts in "Suds in Your Eye," produced at the Cort last night, and it was inevitable that, as the novelty wore off, the comedy should become a trifle monotonous. The first act was so funny that no second act could ever hope to keep up the pace.

It all depends, of course, on how you look at it, but it seems to us the first act alone is worth the price of admision, if only to see Brenda Forbes as Miss Tinkham. To miss this performance is to miss one of the priceless comedy gems of the Broadway season.

"Suds in Your Eye" was taken by Jack Kirkland from a novel by Mary Lasswell with which we are not familiar. The scene is Mrs. Feeley's junk yard in San Diego, and there is amusement to be had merely from gazing at the set which displays, among other treasures, a fence made entirely of beer bottles.

Mrs. Feeley's House Guests

Mrs. Feeley, a hospitable soul, empties a good many bottles from day to day and the first act of the play concerns the advent of her two "house guests," Miss Tinkham and Mrs. Rasmussen. An extension has to be added to the house for the guests, but that is easily achieved in a junk yard, and the trio forthwith becomes a sort of pixiliated sister act, often genuinely hilarious and sometimes also a little pathetic and rather touching.

How closely Mr. Kirkland has clung to the novel we have no way of knowing, but we shouldn't be surprised if the emphasis in the play is more broadly comic. Nevertheless, ridiculous as it all is, one can never quite forget that Miss Tinkham, a perfect lady with an amazing wardrobe, a lorgnette and no money, was homeless until she happened to start drinking beer at Mrs. Feeley's junk yard, and that Mrs. Rasmussen has been tolerated in her daughter's and son-in-law's home only because she draws a pension of $30 a month.

Projected a little differently, "Suds in Your Eye" could easily become a heart-rending story with comic overtones. As it is done at the Cort, however, it is generally slapstick, and there is no doubt that the pace falls off noticeably after the hysterical first act. In his efforts to keep the laughs coming, Mr. Kirkland overdoes it a bit later on, and the evening as a whole is less a play than a series of caricatures and gags. But as we said, the first act alone is worth the price of admision.

Wardrobe Not By Mainbocher

Brenda Forbes, of course, has long been a brilliant comedienne, and Miss Tinkham is a part that gives her every opportunity. Miss Tinkham's clothes are not designed by Mainbocher. They are a lot fancier than anything he could ever think up. No doubt the credit for the Tinkham wardrobe should go to Kermit Love, who is down in the program as the costume designer, although we'd be willing to bet Miss Forbes herself had something to say about details.

Her flair for singing excerpts from "Faust" off-key is only one of her many accomplishments. Her overpowering gentility is her most endearing characteristic.

THE CAST

Chinatown	Chueck Ming Chin Frederic Munn Zseto
Buyer	Russell Morrison
Mrs. Feeley	Jane Darwell
Mr. Fitzgerald	John Adair
Miss Tinkham	Brenda Forbes
Shipyard Worker	Bruno Wick
Conchita	Ruth Gilbert
Mr. Reynolds	Tom Holer
Mrs. Rasmussen	Kasia Orzazewski
Mrs. Rasmussen's Daughter	Wanda Sponder
Elmer	John Gerard
Kate Logan	Janet Tyler
Mrs. Ferguson	Lujah Fonnesbeck
Mr. Wilson	Robert Rhodes
Mrs. Katz	Marie Kenney
Mac	Kenneth Tobey
Mrs. Miller	Cynthia Latham
Danny Feeley	Will Hare
Policeman	Bert James
Armond Hansen	Frank Tweddell
Pinky Kennedy	Tom McElhany
Moe	Loy Nilson
June	Helene Young

As Mrs. Feeley, Jane Darwell, remembered on the screen, notably in "The Grapes of Wrath," is a delightful old party, beer or no beer, and the third member of the happy trio is warmly played by Kasia Orzazewski.

Mr. Kirkland, who has directed with an eye to squeezing every atom of comedy out of his script, has done rather well in casting. Notably the character parts, Wanda Sponder, John Adair, Ruth Gilbert, Frank Tweddell and Tom McElhany are especially fetching and there is a charming performance by a young Chinese boy whom we presume was Frederic Munn Zseto. Tho love interest is nicely taken care of by Will Hare and Janet Tyler.

"Suds in Your Eye," however, is Brenda Forbes' evening. She's the funniest woman in town.

NEW YORK TIMES
January 13, 1944

THE PLAY IN REVIEW
"Suds in Your Eye"

By LEWIS NICHOLS

FROM Mary Lasswell's book of the same title Jack Kirkland has brought forth an evening in the theatre called "Suds in Your Eye." It could not be called a play, exactly, for it has no particular plot; probably Brown and Del Bondio, who offered it last night at the Cort would settle for naming it a character study. Whatever the description, as something which goes on between 8:40 and 11 o'clock it is a little thin, and it is not so funny as it tries to be. There are good moments but not enough of them, "Suds in Your Eye" being on the whole a comedy which does not come off.

* * *

The characters are an elderly Irishwoman who has inherited a junkyard from her husband; a middling-elderly music teacher; an elderly neighbor. Their hopes are to get enough money to pay the taxes on the yard and to get a nephew married to a nice girl who teaches Spanish in a night school. The women run afoul of the tax appraiser and the law, and they drink enormous quantities of beer while they straighten out their difficulties. What they never quite straighten out is the fact that the play—or evening—has a great deal of talk, most of it not so hilarious as it must have seemed in the script.

Jane Darwell of the movies plays the leading role of the junk dealer. She is solid, matter of fact, beery, of course. Brenda Forbes is the music teacher who has wandered off from Ohio to see the Western world and stumbles on the Feeley yard and the Feeley good-will. Miss Forbes dresses outrageously, she faints, she flutters about the stage, singing, skipping and dancing. There is a suspicion that a little of it goes a long way, that Miss Forbes' caricature is good caricature for a time, but not for an entire evening.

The third member of the trio is played by Kasia Orzazewski and is played as near straight as anything could be in "Suds in Your Eye." There is a very good performance by a young Chinese boy named Fredric Munn Zseto, who apparently is to alternate with Chueck Ming Chin, and Frank Tweddell and Tom McElhany are O. K. for cops. Joseph B. Platt has contrived a setting suitable for beer drinking, the sale of junk and as a home for three eccentric ladies If only they had been funnier, or if more had gone on, "Suds in Your Eye" might have been a bit less froth and more body. It is the beer you buy down at the corner, not the bubbles.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
January 13, 1944

Jane Darwell of the Movies Tops Cast of Jack Kirkland's Play

By ROBERT GARLAND

I READ the book called "Suds in Your Eye" and I didn't find it particularly amusing. They told me, those book-reading friends of mine that it is a pretty good novel. In it, nothing much of interest seems to happen but there is a lot of comic conversation among three old articulate females, who can't seem to get enough of one another. They talk and talk amongst themselves, and then what have you?

Well, it wasn't very different last night at the Cort Theatre. This season the Cort has been having a tough time. To come right out and say so, it has been having one flop after another. Where "Suds in Your Eye" is concerned, I wouldn't know. It may be good, it may be bad, it may be definitely indifferent. But I am here to tell you that it is right smart funny.

In her novel, Mary Lasswell sketched a casual characterization of three alcoholic females who didn't quite know what to do about their beer guzzling. Last night, in the current series of tryouts at the Cort, they drank themselves through three acts and 18 beers apiece and, if I am allowed to say so, 18 beers is quite a number of beers but, among the trio, 18 shots of suds is nothing whatsoever.

Without a Plot

If "Suds in Your Eye" had a plot I would be glad to tell you all about it. But "Suds in Your Eye" doesn't have a plot, so the suds and substance of the piece manages to elude me. All I know is that Jack Kirkland has taken three old broomstick riders out of a California waterfront and put them up as exhibit A, B and C on the Cort Theatre stage. Frankly, they are funny, especially when they talk to one another.

In Mr. Kirkland's transcription, as in Miss Lasswell's play, the conversation is casual. The three old witches—they leave their San Diego waterfront every afternoon on a broomstick—drink their beer and dunk their acquaintances like nobody's playwrighting busi-

ness. They talk and talk and talk, but nothing much in the way of plot comes out of it.

If nothing but conversation comes of "Suds in Your Eye," the fault is to be found in the overly conversational complex of the original novel. "Suds in Your Eye" was always a talky improvision. On stage, as off, it is a conversation piece that relies more on wisecracks than on human inter-relationship. In real life, if three old girls managed to eke it out with one another their sense of humor would desert them.

Trio Superb

All the trio Darwell, Brenda Forbes and Kasia Orzazewski are superb as the three beer-drinking witches. Not for a long time have I seen a triangle of actresses play so whole-souledly into one another's hands. It is, of course, Miss Darwell's privilege to outcharacterize the others but the triumph is not altogether hers. She is the big so-and-so around the San Diego waterfront, on the playwright and novelist's say-so.

The men in sailor suits are as they should be. In the program it is hard to tell one from the other. The three old ladies, dominating such action as there is, walk away with most of the acting honors. There's a dark-haired sailor called Danny Feeley and a red-headed sailor whose name I cannot find in the program who are called upon for special mention. Here they are and more power to them.

As, by this time, you have gathered "Suds in Your Eye" is a talkative transcription of a diffuse and undramatic novel. In the translation from library to show-shop, Jack Kirkland has done a wise if not too wonderful job. Fundamentally, "Suds in Your Eye" is undramatic but, at the same time it is conversationally funny. In its position in the seres of productions at the Cort, it is funny without being fabulous.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
January 13, 1944

Suds in Your Eye Is Good Low Comedy

By BURTON RASCOE

WHATEVER else happened at the Cort last night, where Suds in Your Eye, by Jack Kirkland, was introduced to an amiable audience, Brenda Forbes emerged as a low comedy actress of very considerable native endowments and acquired resources. She was the principal (and for a while) the only laugh-getter of the party and once she had got the audience in the palm of her hand she had only to utter the short and simple colloquialism for illegitimate son to send just dozens of her adorers into convulsions of laughter.

All I can say is that if that is the sort of thing you like, that is the sort of thing you like, and that last night, once the play got under way after a slow beginning, the laughter from many quarters was fairly continuous and hearty. I felt out of it because I could not join in the hilarity. But in my time I have heard a lot of women use swear words, and the occasions never seemed to me particularly funny or unfunny. So I have never been able to see why some people laugh so when these words are spoken on the stage by a man, woman or child, and particularly by an old gal. But they do.

Kirkland Formula

All credit for the comedy should go to Jack Kirkland, for, aside from using the title, the scene and the names of the principal characters from a novel by Mary Lasswell, the play bears little resemblance to Miss Lasswell's work. And, in this instance, I think the play, such as it is, is a vast improvement on the novel.

The catch there is that, to my taste, the novel isn't funny either. It is obviously an inexperienced and unimaginative young writer's attempt to write a story she thought would be a sort of combination of Tortilla Flat and Tugboat Annie, and it is completely lacking in the subtlety of the one or the compassionate humanity of the other. It is as undistinctive, trite and mechanical as a mediocre comic strip—the best part about the novel being the illustrations by George Price.

You remember that Mr. Kirkland once turned Tortilla Flat into a Jack Kirkland comedy with very dire results. He has turned Suds in Your Eye into a Jack Kirkland comedy with a surer sense of low comedy appeal, being careful to remember the old burlesque axiom that a joke doesn't get to be good until a burlesque audience has heard it at least a dozen times and so knows when to laugh. And it is a Kirkland axiom that if you use a lot of swear words, spoken by a comic character, you don't need much other comedy—except an idiot girl and a bit of bawdy innuendo here and there.

Appropriate Cast

The comedy values of the Kirkland ingredients are realized to the fullest extent by seasoned veterans such as Miss Forbes, Jane Darwell, John Adair, Frank Tweddell, Tom McElhany and Tom Holer. To these must also be added a name new to me, Kasia Orzazewski, who has been playing in Polish language plays for 20 years and who is a character actress so natural and convincing in her role, that she seemed a little out of place among such low comedy doings, but, to me was the most amusing of the lot. My bows must also be made to Wanda Sponder for executing a rather repulsive bit very expertly and to Ruth Gilbert as a very tarty tart.

The comedy is about an Irishwoman who continues to run a junkyard after the death of her husband in the slums of San Pedro for 40-odd years. She is a lonely old souse and would be a charity case but for a Chinese orphan she adopted as a "nephew," who takes care of her finances. Into her junkyard and her life wander a spinster who has given up music teaching for vagabondage and a Polish woman who is tired of being a drudge to her married daughter. After the three get drunk together they become the Three Musketeers against a workaday world of tax collectors and policemen, a deck of marked cards packed by the outlandish spinster fetching their final triumph.

NEW YORK SUN
January 13, 1944

Low Comedy of a Junk Yard in 'Suds in Mour Eye,' Presented at the Cort

By WARD MOREHOUSE

THE junk yard of Mrs. Feeley, town of San Diego, was transferred to 48th street last night when "Suds in Your Eye" brought laughter, low comedy and some outlandish characters into the Cort Theater. Put it down as crude and antic vaudeville, which now and then brings forth some downright funny stuff.

Jack Kirkland, the man who made a play of "Tobacco Road," the piece having the longest run in all the 212 years that the theater has existed upon the island of Manhattan, saw a comedy in the novel of Mary Lasswell and he wrote it. Wrote it and staged it, and into the Cort it comes under the sponsorship of a new firm, Brown & Del Bondio.

"Suds in Your Eye," as played last evening, concerns the junkyard goings-on of Mrs. Feeley and the two gay old gals who come along as "house guests"—Miss Tinkham and Mrs. Rasmussen. They're an impecunious lot and they have their difficulties with an overzealous tax collector and their troubles with the law, but when the evening is done it appears that they're going to stay out of jail and stay on with their beer drinking, which is more or less continuous. Most of the bizarre people of this play, the wooden Indian excepted, look like creations of George Prince, who did the illustrations for the Lasswell novel.

There are elements of both "Tobacco Road" and "The Great Big Doorstep"* in "Suds in Your Eye" and some of the flavor, too, of a folksy tale of the long, long ago—"Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch." The company engaged for "Suds in Your Eye" provides some richly comical characterizations.

Jane Darwell, once the Ma Joad of the screen production of "The Grapes of Wrath," has a great time with the role of Mrs. Feeley, as does Brenda Forbes as Miss Tinkham, the music teacher. There are also excellent performances from such people as John Gerard, Kasia Orzazewski, Tom Hoier, Ruth Gilbert and Russell Morrison. Janet Tyler, making her first Broadway appearance, gives promise as an ingenue.

Good acting, then, in a crude, aimless, atmospheric and frequently funny play. Joseph B. Platt has done a good job with the scenery and Kermit Love's costumes seem to be just what they should be. Mr. Kirkland has done his own staging.

"Suds in Your Eye" is not out to win prizes. But there are laughs in it and the company at the Cort plays it for all it's worth—and a good deal more.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
January 13, 1944

'Suds in Your Eye,' About Three Tipsy Dames, a Funny Cartoon

By JOHN CHAPMAN

BY all the tests of drama construction "Suds in Your Eye" isn't a very good play—but I spent most of last evening laughing at the fool thing, so the heck with drama construction.

Maybe the plot does wobble; but Brenda Forbes, Jane Darwell and Kasia Orzazewski wobble, too, when they've downed a case of beer, and when they wobble they are very funny. Jack Kirkland, known occasionally as an expert in the less "nice" drama, has done a rather surprising thing: he has made a nice, clean comedy out of female tipsiness.

What he had to start with was a series of episodes masquerading as a small novel, written by Mary Lasswell, and concerning a Mrs. Feeley, who drinks beer and runs a junk yard in San Diego, Calif. Mrs. Feeley, an earthy soul, takes into her shack and into her warm heart a couple of other fairly ancient dames who have no place else to go. On very little money but quite a lot of beer the trio manage to have an innocent and wonderful, though precarious time.

George Price Come to Life

What Mr. Kirkland also had to start with was the illustration in this Lasswell book. If you were a publisher and wanted somebody to draw pictures of three screwy crones, you would engage George Price if you were smart. That is what the publisher did. Well, in casting and costuming the play (with Kermit Love as the costumer) Mr. Kirkland has managed to make three George Price caricatures come to life.

Most hilarious of these creations, in both the book and the play, is one Miss Tinkham, a skinny, twittery spinster who talks formal, waves a lorgnette, wears clothes that must have come from some bat-ridden attic and is a penniless retired teacher of singing and elocution. As portrayed by Brenda Forbes, Miss Tinkham is one to be cherished.

Jane Darwell, who hasn't been on the local stage for years and years, escapes Hollywood to play Mrs. Feeley with plenty of vigor and a pretty good brogue. The role is less salty than is the character in the book, for Mrs. Lasswell appears to be a collector of the simple and earthy humors. I commend Mr. Kirkland for his restraint in the adaptation; not that anything was very terrible, but it's

just as good the way he has done it and nobody can accuse him of being purposely vulgar.

The third of these three amiable guzzlers, Mrs. Rasmussen, is a fitting companion piece for the other two as she is acted by Miss Orzazewski.

More Beer, More Trouble

Out of the Lasswell episodes, which wander into San Diego sailor bars and tourist restaurants in Tia Juana, Kirkland has managed to get almost enough plot and to keep it in the confines of the Feeley junk yard, which is cozily separated from a blowsy street by a fence made of beer bottles. To get his plot the adapter had to junk one, such as it was, from the book, because it covered too much territory; and, having discarded it, he had to invent another.

It serves to keep the old ladies in trouble and in beer. It has a sketchy love story, too, involving a sailor nephew of Mrs. Feeley's and a pretty teacher. And it brings in some Kirkland characters who also are comic, like a couple of addled cops and Mrs. Rasmussen's slatternly daughter (this small bit quite wonderfully played by a girl with the improbable name of Wanda Sponder).

Kirkland's casting is generally accurate and interesting, if not always. I think Will Hare is too unctuous to be a sailor nephew, and that Janet Tyler is the prettiest teacher I ever saw. Joseph B. Platt's set is precisely right.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
January 13, 1944

Nice Beer But Not Much Kick

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

SUDS IN YOUR EYE is a mildly raffish comic strip about three old gals with hearts of gold who cavort in a San Diego junkyard. One of them is an Irish biddy who owns the junk; another is an airy-fairy-lilian of an old maid; the third is a stout foreign momma in flight from a bullying daughter. Under the hostess' leadership, they sop up beer by the case; and this light-headed approach to a generally light-hearted view of the world keeps them in constant hot water. Their finances grow more and more rickety, and their subterfuges more and more desperate. They brush with a tax collector and then tangle with the law; but their high spirits never desert them, and it is fair to suppose that Providence never will either.

It's pretty familiar material, and it runs into pretty familiar difficulties. Mr. Kirkland has squeezed some good fun out of it in places, and has preserved a properly light tone throughout. As the half-genteel, half-wacky old maid, Brenda Forbes, swaying in her cups, managed to be very amusing on occasion, and Jane Darwell gives a racy edge to her portrayal of the old biddy. But the fun is fitful, and gets thinner as it proceeds.

• • •

The trouble can be laid at several doors. To begin with, Mr. Kirkland has gone in for too mild and mixed a brew. His beery humors are diluted with a lot of whimsical peppermint, and much of the play is on the cute and skittish side. Beyond this, a lot of the dialogue is just not good enough. A comedy of this kind, which offers nothing in the way of a plot, must captivate in one of two ways. It must either deal richly and genuinely with character; or, keeping to a lower level, it must possess an unflagging verve. The three old gals of *Suds in Your Eye* never begin to seem like real people; and their carryings-on have no sustained gusto or exuberance. The result is a good-natured and unassuming enough play that becomes pretty tiresome.

Mr. Kirkland has staged *Suds* pleasantly, and there are some nice performances in addition to Miss Forbes and Miss Darwell. Particularly likeable is Fredric Munn Zseto as a young Chinese boy.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
January 13, 1944

Junk Yard Farce

By OTIS L. GUERNSEY, JR.

THE script of the new comedy "Suds in Your Eye," which made its bow last night at the Cort, is a curious sketchbook of comedy characterizations. Primarily, it is a showcase for its three principal characters—three eccentric old women who are striving to keep an equally old junkyard with house attached from going under the hammer. But as a play it does not go beyond the mere presentation of some occasionally funny people. A few jokes are repeated again and again, and the play gradually succumbs to the intrusion of slapstick gags. In the absence of a plot, it cooks up a single situation and warms it over for three acts.

• • •

The hardiest struggle for the play's ramshackle premises is waged by Mrs. Feeley, an elderly Irishwoman played by Jane Darwell, whose two favorite occupations are swearing and building a fence out of empty beer bottles. Like the mistress of the house in "You Can't Take It With You," she has too big a heart to refuse a home to the homeless, and she takes in two other old hens, a retired music teacher named Miss Tinkham (Brenda Forbes) and her next-door neighbor (Kasia Orzazewski). The playwright, Kirkland, has bent all his efforts toward manufacturing laughs out of the conversations among these three harpies. This is fine, as far as it goes, and there are several excellent scenes. But there is a limit to the audience's amusement at drunkeness, swearing, puns, down-at-the-heels gentility, etc., and the three are never made to realize that they are supposed to be part of a play. When they do occasionally remember there is not much for them to do, anyway.

• • •

If Miss Forbe's excellent comedy sense could have pulled the play together, it would have—she is perfect as the fallen but refined music teacher, both in gesture and inflection. Miss Darwell's bolsterous manner and Irish brogue make up a perfect foil for this character, and Miss Orzazewski's aggressive use of unfamiliar English rounds out a promising comedy triangle. In the rest of the characterization Mr. Kirkland has left too much to slapstick and convention—besides the three principals, only a Chinese boy, played by Fredric Munn Zseto and a floosie in the person of Ruth Gilbert, become more than symbols. Even the principals become distorted after awhile, lacking material to enlarge upon their original effect.

• • •

The prop and costume departments have helped out with a few odd items like a cigar-store Indian, a wealth of beer bottles and suitably out-of-date dresses worn with innocent gayety by Miss Forbes. There is nothing in the staging to take away the play's static quality; usually the cast just stands around watching. Most of "Suds in Your Eye" is just three old women having some fun drinking beer; the audience has some fun with them, but only occasionally.

"Storm Operation"

Play by Maxwell Anderson; staging by Michael Gordon and settings by Howard Bay. Presented by the Playwrights' Company at the Belasco Theatre, January 11, 1944.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
January 12, 1944

Anderson's Storm Operation, War Realism in Drama

By BURTON RASCOE

AT LAST a war play has come along in which soldiers talk and act like soldiers and not like pantywaists, eyes agleam and lips adrip with words of high and noble purpose. I speak of, and recommend, Storm Operation, by Maxwell Anderson, which opened last night at the Belasco. That is, I recommend it, if you are not too squeamish about the language used in your presence or unless you do not care to learn any of the facts of war from the stage.

Storm Operation is not a "thrilling" play or even a "moving" one, not nearly so moving on the stage as I daresay it will prove to be in pictures. (For we must face the fact that no ingenuity on the part of electricians or scene designers can make an "incident" of war seem anything more than some actors in freshly besmeared costumes moving awkwardly about among some painted canvas to the accompaniment of offstage noises meant to resemble rifle and cannon fire; whereas the same scenes can be made very real by the space freedom of the movies.)

But, whereas Storm Operation doesn't make your hair tingle or a lump come into your throat the way a few feet of a war newsreel can, it is also not one of those theatrical artificialities that are more an "institutional" advertisement than like a drama or an evening's entertainment.

What Price Glory? Anew

In Storm Operation Mr. Anderson has got much of the same sort of gustiness, forthright realism and romantic camaraderie that he and Laurence Stallings got into What Price Glory? in 1924, as their memento of

THE CAST

First Sergt. Peter Moldau	Myron McCormick
Abe	Joseph Dorn
Winkle	Alan Schneider
Simeon, a Technical Sergeant	Cy Howard
Mart, a Technical Sergeant	Millard Mitchell
Dougie	Michael Ames
Bread Seller	Joseph De Santis
The Muezzin	Nehem Simone
Stefano	Carlo Respighi
Lieut. Thomasina Grey	Gertrude Musgrove
Lieut. Kathryn Byrne	Dorothea Freed
Lieut. Dammartin	Walter Kohler
Corporal Ticker	Bertram Tanswell
Capt. Sutton	Bramwell Fletcher
Mabroukha	Sara Anderson
Arab Guide	Maurice Doner
Chuck, a Technical Sergeant	Charles Ellis
Corporal Hermann Geist	Louis Fabien
Squillini	Nick Dennis
Arab Women	Marianne Blier, Elizabeth Inglise, Julie O'Brien, Lela Vanti
Arab Boy	Neil Towner

World War I. Going to Africa, talking to Eisenhower and living with Eisenhower's men on the battle fronts has been good for Mr. Anderson; for when he wrote The Eve of St. Mark, he only partially remembered what soldiering was like and filled in his plan with some tableaux apparently inspired by calendars depicting scenes of New England farm life and of Betsy Ross at her needlework.

Storm Operation begins with a scene of an invasion barge loaded with men; alongside a ship, their immediate objective being the shore of Oran. This set, designed by Howard Bay, and lighted by Moe Hack, is wonderously effective, as is the set designed by an officer's tent and surroundings near Manassky, though the scene designed for battle action is not illusion-creating for reason of the handicap mentioned above.

In command of the barge is a first sergeant (Myron McCormick) who is, happily, not like the thousands of unintentional burlesques of Sergt. Quirt, but a former riveter who was drafted (as he is careful to explain), trained in commando tactics and is scared (and admits it) and who makes his necessary, set speech and gives his final orders to men who have been drilled in a few essential Arabic words and who, presumably, have carefully studied their manuals on How to Get Along with the British and How to Behave Among the Arabs. Then the barge shoves off.

Love Triangle

Next we are in the midst of a full-fledged drama of the rivalry of Mr. McCormick and Bramwell Fletcher (as a titled British army captain) over Gertrude Musgrove (as Lt. Thomasina Grey, an army nurse) which is a rivalry greatly intensified by the Briton's arrogance, superior condescension and downright insulting attitude toward Americans in general and toward Mr. McCormick in particular. Mr. McCormick is in temporary command of 30 men and, as a liaison officer, attached to the outfit, the Briton finds he must unwillingly take orders from a sergeant and an inexperienced American sergeant at that.

You can guess how this inter-Allied contretemps is cleared up, but it probably won't be the right guess; for Mr. Anderson is neither obvious nor banal in this play. For good comedy relief there is a double-talking genius (Cy Howard) who can fix anything and who buys himself an Arab girl and an amiable, sardonic technical sergeant (Millard Mitchell) who convulses the audience with his disclosures of soldier language and the army orders relating thereto . . . Miss Musgrove's elocution is much too elocutionary for my taste; but the large cast is good, in general, and the Messrs. McCormick, Fletcher, Mitchell and Howard in particular.

NEW YORK TIMES
January 12, 1944

THE PLAY IN REVIEW
"Storm Operation"

By LEWIS NICHOLS

MAXWELL ANDERSON has contributed a good many distinguished plays to the theatre, but "Storm Operation," which opened last evening at the Belasco, is not one of them. To gather material for it, he toured the Army's lines in North Africa, and from General Eisenhower, himself, he received the suggestion for the title—which was the code name for invasion. But back on Broadway he has turned out a drama about the war which in no sense is as good as last season's "The Eve of St. Mark." It is talky and slow, and some of it is maudlin, a charge not often made honestly against Mr. Anderson.

• • •

"Storm Operation" really can be divided into two plays. Part of it concerns a group of average American soldiers who are learning the ropes of their trade on the battle line, who are groping for the reasons of war and the effect. Mr. Anderson can write brilliant and quick dialogue about the usual every-day events in the lives of such a group, and the first part of the play, when the soldiers are discussing nothing much, is easily the best. The lines are funny, sharp and clear, bringing out the various characters. But unfortunately for the evening, the bright lines slow down and finally stop altogether.

The second play is something else again. This one concerns an Army nurse who had been in love with an American top sergeant, had left him to take up with an English captain but meets him again when she and the captain arrive at the forward lines where he is in charge. While airplanes roar overhead, the two of them discuss their love and the reasons for it, and what they will do about it and why. This all ends on a note of something more than incredibility, with the British captain, who luckily once had studied for the Church and so carries a Bible, reading the marriage service for them. A good loser, that one.

• • •

There can be no question that Mr. Anderson has been deeply sincere in trying to bring to the theatre a picture of what the Army is facing and how it is behaving in action. His play opens on a landing barge before Africa; the men are humble, but they will do their best. In camp and in the front lines they are honest, so honest that it would be a pleasure to see more of them. But toward the end of the first of the two acts "Storm Operation" goes pretty much to pieces; the action slows, the speeches grow long and sometimes sentimental, and love, in its worst Broadway sense, comes along with the suggestion that here is just another play, and not a good one.

The performances are much better than the material. Myron McCormick, as the top sergeant; carries an air of authority which is excellent, and Millard Mitchell has another of his wry roles as a technical sergeant. A good deal of the comedy is given to Cy Howard—part of it involving the purchase of an Arab girl—and he does well with it. Gertrude Musgrove is the nurse and Bramwell Fletcher is the British captain, both roles being rather unhappily developed on the typewriter. Howard Bay has provided the play with good settings. The auspices were right for "Storm Operation" to be a great contribution to the theatre's reporting of the war, but it has failed to live up to the promises.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
January 12, 1944

Mr. Anderson at His Dullest

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

IT IS hard to believe that *Storm Operation* could have been written by Maxwell Anderson. On a lot of his plays I have come down hard, finding them high-flown, or exasperating, or confused. But behind the would-be poet at his worst, or the thinker at his most ponderous, was the sense of a man who in some degree knew his way about the stage. But *Storm Operation* offers no sense of anythin. Doubtless it is not uncommon for a man to write a war play that lacks all reality. But it is certainly remarkable that, in addition to this, he should write a war play that lacks even the slightest suspense; that moves from scene to scene without your once caring about what comes next. *Storm Operation* is not only an extremely bad play; it is also a staggeringly dull one.

The story drags through several months of the North African campaign; but though, at intervals, maps are studied, skirmishes are fought and men are killed, the main action concerns the rivalry between an American top sergeant and a titled English captain, partly over a command and partly over a girl. The triangle story, besides being utterly trite, is fitted out with some of Mr. Anderson's most philosophic speeches. It is hard to believe that it comes from the same hand that helped fashion the zestful triangle story of the French girl and Sergeants Flagg and Quirt in *What Price Glory?* The Englishman in *Storm Operation*, who goes around looking like a bust of Lord Byron superimposed on a pair of dirty khaki shorts, is fantastic; and the girl—an Australian nurse—is only less fantastic by comparison. The finale to all this scrupulously preserves the general tone; while Stukas roar menacingly overhead, milord sportingly reads the marriage service over his rival and the lady.

• • •

Despite so much romance, Mr. Anderson still seems afraid to devote the rest of the play to the realities of war, and accordingly spends much of it in displays of soldier humor. There is, for example, a company cut-up who, besides indulging ad nauseam in double talk, buys queer animals and even Arab women; and there are such dainty passages as a general discussion of badly cooked camel meat. Had any of this been funny, it might have earned the right to crowd the war out of a war play. But *Storm Operation* no more succeeds in being funny—at least for my taste—that it does in being serious.

In the face of so many unreal characters and so much labored dialogue, it is hard to assess the production. As the English lord and the girl, Bramwell Fletcher and Gertrude Musgrove are rather given to attitudes. But their peculiarities should probably be blamed on the script and the direction. In any case, as the sergeant, Myron McCormick comes off far better, giving a generally straightforward performance.

NEW YORK POST
January 12, 1944

Maxwell Anderson's Latest War Play, 'Storm Operation'

By WILELLA WALDORF

MAXWELL ANDERSON'S sortie into North Africa in search of first-hand information about Americans at war has resulted in an artificial and curiously trivial play entitled "Storm Operation," produced last night at the Belasco Theatre by The Playwrights' Company.

For months now we have been hearing exciting tales of how Mr. Anderson charged into Tunisia, collecting dramatic material on the historic spots where our boys actually fought, and how General Eisenhower himself suggested that his play about the invasion be called "Storm Operation."

Naturally we had been expecting something rather special, certainly something a bit beyond the old triangle—two men and a girl—that Mr. Anderson serves up in and about Maknassy and Mazzouna.

There were times last night when we experienced the not altogether happy sensation of sitting before a Grade B movie instead of the premiere of a new war drama written by one of Broadway's leading playwrights.

Two Soldiers and a Nurse

Not having visited either Bataan or Tunisia, we are in no position to report on the accuracy of the details of Mr. Anderson's two war plays, "The Eve of St. Mark" and "Storm Operation," but as a playgoer we can say definitely that "The Eve of St. Mark" was a very moving drama that had many stirring moments and was, on the whole, a convincing picture of young America at war.

"Storm Operation," on the other hand, not only failed to move or stir us in the slightest degree last night, but most of the time couldn't even persuade us that it was anything more than a hoked-up scenario about an Australian nurse adored by a British captain and an American top sergeant.

The top sergeant is in charge of what remains of his company when the Americans

are attempting to push the Nazis into the sea, and the British captain is a liaison officer from the British Eighth Army. The captain—a Lord, no less, back in dear old England—is a bit put out at having to deal with a top sergeant instead of a commissioned officer, and there are numerous scenes in which Myron McCormick and Bramwell Fletcher face each other sturdily and have it out.

Anglo-American Relations

The Americans, after all, are new at the war game, while the Britisher is an old hand at tackling the Afrika Korps. Mr. Anderson has apparently been impressed with the conduct of our green troops and their ability to learn the hard way, and he has managed to be fairly amusing now and then on the subject of Anglo-American relations (with guide books) and the quaint customs of the local Arabs.

But our chief impression of "Storm Operation" is a group of rather foolish looking still photographs showing Captain Fletcher, British as all get-out, confronting Sergeant McCormick, spunky and American, God bless him. Between them, in a series of stained-glass attitudes, is Lt. Gertrude Musgrove, whose role is one of the most baffling of the season so far. No wonder she seemed thoroughly uncomfortable in it.

Mr. Anderson is more successful with his comic relief than he is with anything else in the play. Cy Howard as a double-talking technician is often very amusing, and so are some of the better Anderson lines. But on the whole it is a highly disappointing script, inexpertly directed.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
January 12, 1944

'Storm Operation' Opens at Belasco

By ROBERT GARLAND

THE trouble these nights at the Belasco is obvious. In his haste and enthusiasm Maxwell Anderson wrote two plays, calling each one "Storm Operation." Then, having written them, he superimposed one upon the other. The result is just as you'd imagine it would be — confused, diffused, remarkably uneven. When the Playwright Company's new offering is good, it is very, very good. When it isn't—

Well, when "Storm Operation" is very, very good, it is a factional and red-blooded report on American troops in Africa. You see our young Americans live and die, talking good American talk and double-talk as they do so. All this is both comforting and confusing. Mostly comforting.

But when "Storm Operation" isn't very, very good, it is an out-and-out melodrama, a battle, murder and sudden death hair-raiser containing a phoney love duet between a top sergeant and an army nurse which is thrown in to make things more romantic. This part of the piece isn't as believable as it should be. Maybe Maxwell Anderson, one of our first-playwrights, may know what he's writing about. But I doubt it.

* * *

You pick up these young Americans aboard a landing barge en route to Africa. They are in charge of Top Sergeant Peter Moldau, as good a guy as we make them. He is in a talkative mood, admitting that, among many another thing, he is frightened. So, to disguise his terror and his uncertainty, he gives the boys a lecture. This lecture—a bit too long but exceedingly revealing—is tops in Mr. Anderson's drama.

Then we move ashore. First to an officer's tent somewhere near Maknassy. Then to the forward lines near Mazzouna. Then to the dry bed of a stream in the mountains above Mazzaouna. Then back to the forward lines. And, last, to the invasion barge, ready to embark for another port, and, according to the sergeant, one more invasion.

As you see, the outline of the piece is as simple as it is effective. So is the dialogue. So is the human quality, the relation of one good soldier to another. It is only when "Storm Operation" gets involved with the love affair between Top Sergeant Peter Moldau and Lt. Thomasina Grey that unreality sets in and the Maxwell Anderson play goes phonily to pieces. Then it just isn't honest or believable.

* * *

"Storm Operation" is acted to perfection. Especially by the Myron McCormick who plays 1st Sergeant Peter Moldau with straight-faced and sturdily effective sincerity. He knows the lad inside out and projects him with three-dimensional impressiveness. You get to know him, too, which is one of the major delights of a far from undelightful evening. Not since Mr. Anderson's "Winterset" has Mr. McCormick's artistry been keener.

As Simeon, a technical sergeant who gets killed before the evening's over, Cy Howard, a refugee from radio, could not be bettered. His excursions into double talk are something to be applauded. Millard Mitchell, recently the manager of Gypsy Rose Lee in "The Naked Genius," is outstanding as Mart, another sergeant.

Bramwell Fletcher deals with Captain Sutton, an Englishman adrift among underranking Americans with skill and understanding. When, at last, he actually comes over to our side, he is touchingly effective. Gertrude Musgrove does her talented best with Lt. Thomasina Grey, known in and around North America as Tommi. The sets, by Howard Bay, are simple and impressive . . . "Storm Operation" is not as constantly first-rate as its theme and its author warrant But, for the most part, it's sound and forthright wartime theatre.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
January 12, 1944

Anderson's 'Storm Operation' Has More Realism Than Reality

By JOHN CHAPMAN

"STORM OPERATION" was Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower's code phrase for the North African invasion when it was in the planning stage, and Maxwell Anderson's play of that title, which opened last night at the Belasco, is a realistic drama of the invasion itself.

It is realistic, yes, in all its surface detail, for Anderson did his research right in North Africa—and Eisenhower himself is reported to have suggested the play title. But beneath its accuracy of appearance, beneath its gusty soldier talk, I found it unmoving in long stretches.

When upon occasion it did live and breathe and have being, it was usually the doing of one Cy Howard, a radio comedian and director who is a temporary fugitive from Jack Benny's gag-writing staff. Mr. Howard offers as likable a stage portrait as I have seen this season in his Broadway debut—a Signal Corps handyman who conducts most of his conversation in double-talk and whom, therefore, the Arabs understand more readily than they do other Yanks.

North African Campaign

Mr. Howard's work is not brash, but winning. He is an amiable G. I. who can either talk or work his way through a tough job; he even persuades his sergeant to let him keep an Arab girl whom he bought for 800 francs. The doubletalk is, I fancy, his own contribution to the role, for this time Mr. Anderson has written a straight drama with no dreams and no blank verse.

It opens with Myron McCormick, a sergeant, and a detachment of men in an invasion barge before the dawn Oran was attacked. It moves to a company headquarters tent at Maknassy; then forward to Mazzouna, and beyond Mazzouna into the mountains on a reconnaissance patrol.

The outfit is a small one, getting smaller through casualties. The captain is away and a couple of lieutenants are away and the sergeant is running the show. In addition to his regular, begrimed, tough-talking crew, he has a French liaison officer, a couple of girl nurses and a British captain assigned as liaison from Montgomery's Eighth.

The Briton, a snob but a seasoned soldier, doesn't like taking orders from a Yank sergeant, nor does he like the sergeant moving in on a nurse he thought was his. That's part of the conflict, and somehow it did not greatly exercise me.

Nor did I care greatly about the sergeant vs. the nurse. A draftee become a good fighting man, he has gained the soldier's attitude of "living off the country"—taking what comes when it comes, for nothing may ever come again. The nurse, on the other hand, wants something to cherish—something beyond the dirty, bloody African war.

Love Wins Once More

She wins. They do begin to think of a tomorrow—of a home, and peace. The British captain, although possessing no clerical authority, marries them in a stagey ceremony while Stukas dive upon the wedding party. In an epilogue the sergeant is again in an invasion barge, talking to his men about a new operation; and now he thinks men must have something to fight for. The best soldier, he says, is one with a picture in his pocket.

The principles—McCormick, the sergeant; Gertrude Musgrove, the nurse, and Bramwell Fletcher, the captain—seem slightly uneasy, as though they cannot quite come to grips with the people the playwright seeks to evoke. Millard Mitchell has an easy, humorous role as a communications sergeant, and Cy Howard, in addition to providing comedy, has one well-played dramatic scene in which, on a patrol, he is puzzled to find a hand paralyzed from pure nervousness and fright, and in which, later, he suffers a fatal wound.

Michael Gordon directed. Howard Bay's camouflaged tent in desert setting looks like the real thing.

NEW YORK SUN
January 12, 1944

'Storm Operation,' Maxwell Anderson's New War Play, Opens at Belasco

By WARD MOREHOUSE

MAXWELL ANDERSON, in collaboration with Laurence Stallings, wrote a great war play in "What Price Glory." He achieved an eloquent one with "The Eve of St. Mark." Now he turns to the North African campaign and submits a drama that is no better than fair. It has moments of vitality, there is starkness in a lot of the writing, but the play is never resolved and it is curiously flat for much of the way.

"Storm Operation" is the title. It's a title direct from Gen. Eisenhower. It's a play of men and women in actual combat and how they take it; a play of today's front pages, of the day before yesterday's and of tomorrow's. Surely a subject which, it would seem, Mr. Anderson might grapple successfully, but his drama never becomes a piece of stature. It is always more of a production than a play.

In "Storm Operation" this dramatist from the Hudson's West Bank writes of American infantrymen at the business of war in the combat zone of Tunisia, with desert sands underfoot and Jerry overhead. He writes of